CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS UNDER THE T7ANG: COMMERCE

As we have several times said, the nearly three centuries of the T'ang were, with the exception of some of the later years of weakness, among the most prosperous and culturally brilliant in the history of China. During the years of disunion before the Sui and the T'ang, foundations were being laid for a new flowering of civilization. The Sui had encouraged the revival of culture. The internal order which characterized most of the first century and a quarter of T'ang rule made for prosperity. Although the census figures are probably highly inaccurate, the population seems to have been fairly large. A conjecture for 618, possibly excessive, speaks of a total of nearly one hundred and thirty millions. The census of 726 is said to have given the number of Chinese as about forty-one and a half millions, and an estimate for 733 put it at over forty-three millions. When every allowance is made for obvious errors, these figures disclose a state which must have been one of the most populous of its time. So large a body of people could not fail to attract merchants from other lands.

Foreign trade appears to have reached greater proportions under the T'ang than at any previous time. As in the earlier periods, it was due chiefly to the initiative of aliens. Foreign merchants in China seem to have been very much more numerous than were Chinese merchants and travellers abroad. This may have been because the Chinese were so engrossed in developing the vast resources of their own land that they were not tempted to go outside its borders.

Again, as in earlier dynasties, it was both by land and by sea

that foreigners came to China. The routes through the basin of the Tarim to the Northwest were, of course, traversed, especially during the first century and a quarter or more of the T'ang when the authority of the Empire was usually strong in Central Asia. From the middle of the eighth century, when Chinese dominion in that region crumbled and when disorders in China itself increased, trade by these roads probably was not so prosperous. Even then, however, it continued, especially as long as the Uighur power gave a certain amount of unity to the Tarim Valley—in spite of tolls and exactions from local rulers which must have pressed heavily upon it and of raids and wars which must have interrupted it.